



Center for the Evangelical United Brethren Heritage

TELESCOPE-MESSENGER

United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio

Vol. 22 No. 2

Summer 2012

Reflections on World Mission in the EUB, Methodist, and United Methodist Traditions

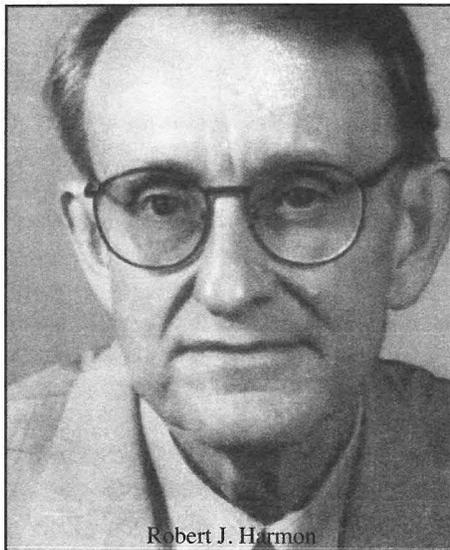
by
Robert J. Harman

Twenty one years after union of the Evangelical United Brethren Church (EUB) and the Methodist Church (ME), I was elected to head the World Division of the mission agency of the United Methodist Church (UMC). I was the third former EUB elected to that position in the new church following John L. Schaefer and Lois Miller. I succeeded Peggy Billings, the only former ME to briefly hold the office after union.

I write these reflections at the invitation of the editor of the *Telescope-Messenger* to reflect upon distinct characteristics of the philosophy of mission of the EUB that prevailed at the time of the 1968 union with the ME. To accomplish this request, I have taken the liberty of highlighting the contrasts between the two denominational approaches to mission prior to union. I will also provide an audit of the status of the mission relationships of the former EUB that continue into the UMC and to reflect upon some mission policies and practices accommodated at union. I write from the perspective of my service as a mission administrator. There are, of course, other perspectives.

By 1989, after two decades of administration of the combined missionary interests of the two former denominations, there were few occasions when a recall of the distinct characteristics of the two denominational streams served any purpose. Most of the active members of the missionary community had been recruited and commissioned under UMC policies. The remnant members commissioned by the predecessor churches had folded into the ranks of the UM missionary community. Most of the officers of the partner churches and conferences around the world had taken up their leadership posts after 1968

and expressed only passing interest in events before church union, unless there were inquiries about a former EUB Church that still had fund raising potential. Membership in ecumenical agencies and participation in cooperative church bodies seldom called for identification of past histories.



Robert J. Harman

Mission Philosophies

The mission philosophies of the two churches shared a common motivation but differed on approach. Their single and unequivocal devotion was to save souls. Their message emphasized God's grace over human effort as the way to salvation. They were wary of preaching the gospel out of a sense of duty. There is no recorded sermon by John Wesley using the so-called "mission mandate" or Great Commission in Matthew 28 as a text. Instead of responding to a command, he wanted his preachers to emphasize gratitude for the redeeming and transforming experience of God's grace. Jacob Albright found evangelization based upon obligation to betray the "joy of the Lord" to be experienced in receiving the good news of salvation.¹ Albright believed social and cultural benefits were to be found among the "other things" shared with the gospel message.

The mission vision of the founders took root and prospered in North American soil thanks to the strong prevailing spirit of revivalism during the period of the Second Great Awakening. But theirs was also a "story to tell to the nations." By mid-19th century, Methodist, Evangelical, and United Brethren missionaries were sent to countries in Latin America, Europe, Asia, and Africa to share the good news of the gospel. While the message of free grace extended to all was a common theme wherever missionaries were deployed, there were stark differences in how former EUB and Methodist personnel organized their work.

Wesley emphasized order, i.e., the form and structure of supervision in the formation of the church in the colonies. Charged with the broad purpose of evangelizing the growing continental frontier, early Methodist preachers were assigned to circuits that were organized into conferences and accountable to superintendents and bishops. They successfully aimed at making Methodism a leading brand of American Protestantism.

The ministries of Albright and Otterbein settled upon reaching immigrant families of their own German heritage. While they were equally passionate about sharing the gospel and patterned the organization of their local societies after the Methodists, neither denominational identity nor organizational principles occupied their attention. According to church historian Paul Eller, they “never yielded to the notion that it was the only communion in possession of the gospel.”²

When it came to advancing their work in countries beyond the United States, these same influences prevailed. The churches formed by missionaries of the former ME were replicas of the connectional units of the American church and strongly tied to the structures of the “mother/ sending church.” In contrast, the missionary movement of the EUB Church encouraged the formation of independent or cooperative mission churches that were indigenously led and locally accountable.

Mission Relationships beyond the U.S.

Two Case Studies

In at least two places (Puerto Rico and the Philippines) where these organizational philosophies co-existed markedly different results can be observed.

Puerto Rico. As the result of the 1968 union, the UMC inherited two partner churches in Puerto Rico. The legacy of the former EUB mission was the United Evangelical Church (UEC), a locally autonomous ecumenical denomination that also had ties with the United Church of Christ in the U.S. The former ME had established an annual conference for its churches in Puerto Rico to relate to the larger North American denomination. The UEC wrote its own constitution, elected its own leaders, and largely funded its own institutions and outreach programs. The UM Conference was presided over by a bishop from the U.S. who appointed the superintendent of the conference. The superintendent administered the policies of the *Book of Discipline* of the general church and appealed for funds from the mission agency and supporting conferences of the UMC.

When mission executives of the UMC visited the island there were only occasional meetings with the

leaders of the UEC. When they occurred, the meeting agendas seldom included substantial relationship issues. More often they featured the flaunting of their independence by the UEC participants. They were committed to self-propagation. Their pastors were locally recruited and supported. They prized their self-sufficiency. Although their financial situation was every bit as precarious as that of the UMC Conference, the UEC called upon the resourcefulness of their membership to address the issues. When reserves for pensions for future retirees ran low the pastors found financial security through part-time secular employment. Before there was a serious crisis, they succeeded in negotiating financial independence for their beloved Ryder Memorial Hospital.

The UEC honored self governance by electing its own leaders and holding them accountable. When social issues on the island required a Christian witness, the voice of the President of the church—a local citizen—would be heard. The UEC also exercised its autonomy by redefining its relationships with its other denominational mission partner, The United Church of Christ, and then deciding to disaffiliate in 2006 when the UCC policies on inclusiveness of gays, lesbians, and transgender persons in ministry and membership caused discomfort within the UEC.

By contrast, the relationship between the denominational mission agency and the UM Conference in Puerto Rico was far more demanding. Major decisions awaited the periodic visits of the presiding bishop from the U.S. When significant funding was needed for capital development such as securing properties for church building projects, proposals were directed to the mission board in New York that held titles to most church properties on the island and administered loan funds on favorable terms for local churches. Although there was a fine ecumenical seminary for the training of pastors, the large number of graduates was not needed for serving church expansion on the island, but rather to replace a growing number of retiring pastors and those who left the island to meet the increasing demand for Spanish speaking churches in the U.S.

Puerto Rican UM leaders spent the two decades following church union in 1968 in a protracted debate about whether their future should be as a conference within the connection of the UMC or as an autonomous Methodist Church. In 1992 they chose autonomy, a decision that was ratified by the General Conference of the UMC but with a number of exceptions: (1) continuation of their pastors in the pension program of the UMC; (2) continuation of access to scholarship assistance from the programs of

the Board of Ministry and Higher Education; (3) continued access to grants and loans from the Board of Global Ministries; and (4) representation on the Council of Bishops by their newly elected Bishop as well as voting membership in the General Conference by their lay and clergy delegates.

Philippines. Church relationships in the Philippines reflected a similar pattern. The mission of the former EUB entered into the work of cooperating denominations that formed the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). It was independent and locally governed. Financial support from abroad was insignificant. The UCCP bishops were elected by and were accountable to the membership. It was strongly committed to an indigenous and ecumenical witness to the Gospel. A policy of well-trained local pastors prevailed over missionary appointments to local churches. The UCCP became a member of the European-based United Evangelical Mission Council, an international cooperative mission body that recruits member church personnel for service in developing countries.

The former ME conference in the Philippines was the only Methodist mission conference in all of Asia to choose to remain in a connection with the new UMC. The mission in Japan had joined other Protestant denominations in a united church in anticipation of increased government surveillance of foreign entities in the years before World War II. All of the other Methodist churches in the region chose autonomy in the quadrennium prior to or after the 1968 church union.

The status of a Central Conference allowed UMs in the Philippines to remain connected with the governance structure of the denomination. They elect their own bishops who are salaried by the general church and hold membership on the UM Council of Bishops. Decision-making within the Central Conference is known to be contentious, so visiting UM bishops from the U.S. attend business sessions to preside and or to moderate. Often the unresolved issues of the meetings are appealed to the UM Judicial Council for resolution.

Church leaders have encouraged UM churches in the Philippines to become overtly evangelical reaching new populations throughout the islands. New institutions for higher education and theological training have been established to meet demands for new leadership. As the number of new churches increased and new conferences were created for supervision, the Central Conference appealed to several General Conferences for the creation of new Episcopal areas. None of these requests was approved. Discouragement over the lack of self-governance began to build and soon there was a

growing movement within the Central Conference to establish the church's autonomy. The emphasis of their campaign focuses on the need for local accountability, a theme that has been gaining traction and is now strong enough to elect at least one of their three presiding UM bishops of that persuasion.

The UCCP and the UMC participate together in the national ecumenical body and serve in the administration of significant church-based institutions such as Union Theological Seminary and Philippine Christian University. There is little other evidence of cooperation. The same could be said for the two churches in Puerto Rico with common roots in the UM mission history. The current leaders of the churches look forward to the challenges of the future and have little interest in uncovering their missionary histories. But that history discloses a strong commitment to the philosophy of self-determination of the former EUB mission board and little reticence by its leaders in advocating its value today.

Historical Perspective

Dialogue on Autonomy and Connectionalism

In 1966 the Methodist Commission on the Structure of Methodism Overseas hosted a major consultation in Green Lake, Wisconsin on the changing nature of mission relationships in light of the successes of independence movements over colonial authorities in many countries. Representatives were sent from every conference in the Methodist global connection. In anticipation of union with the EUB, Bishop Harold Heinger, President of the EUB Board of Missions, and Dr. John L. Schaefer, Executive Secretary of the EUB Division of World Missions, were invited.

Dr. Schaefer was asked to address the body. He spoke forcefully of the history and policies of the denomination that committed it to ecumenism and the development of indigenous leadership and locally administered communities of faith. "EUB missionaries were sent to Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America to preach the gospel of Christ, to win converts, to baptize believers, and [to] help establish His church. The environment in these countries was vastly different from conditions in Pennsylvania and Ohio in the years following the Revolutionary War. Consequently the missionaries were expected to exalt Christ and leave their denominational loyalties on the North American shores."²

Advocating the diminution of missionary and denominational influence was not only a timely message given the historical context of this gathering, but a straightforward statement of the working philosophy of EUB missions in countries outside of the U.S. According to Schaefer, the EUB made a

pledge to the new churches enabling them to experience complete independence from denominational jurisdiction over their affairs, develop their own declarations of faith and patterns of worship, and form their own strategies of evangelistic outreach and administrative structures. Moreover, all were encouraged to seek close fellowship in an organic union with other Christian bodies within their national boundaries to form united churches. That guidance adhered closely to the historic ecumenical vision for realizing a visible unity of the churches and more explicitly the theme “Called to be One Church in each Place,” given strong emphasis in official gatherings of the World Council of Churches in the 1960s.

There is considerable evidence that ME missionary outreach was not inclined to set aside its denominational DNA. The first ME missionaries to Latin America, for instance, went equipped with a letter of introduction from U.S. President Andrew Jackson. They used it for introductions to expatriate Methodist businessmen from the States who became the nucleus of the churches they were planting. The pattern for organizing the early churches was taken from the pages of the *Book of Discipline* written by the church and enforced by assigned missionary personnel. Spanish language worship services awaited the recruitment and validation of indigenous personnel from schools established by the missionaries.

In 1957, Methodist historian Wade C. Barclay expressed misgivings about this direction in his *History of Methodist Missions*: “At the end of the half century as at the beginning, the sense of obligation to reproduce the polity of America Methodism without adaptation of any kind determined missionary

activity . . . Would it not have been a wiser policy for missionary societies to have encouraged the development of indigenous Churches in the several mission fields.”³

Prior to 1964, self-governance and direction was the exception for churches founded by ME missionary outreach. Only three ME mission conferences had appealed for autonomy (Mexico, Brazil, and Korea in 1930). Immediately following the Green Lake consultation that Schaefer addressed, 28 of the 54 overseas conferences of the former ME chose autonomy, responding to the kinds of cultural issues that guided the EUB mission in developing self-determining national churches from the start. Some joined united churches (Bangladesh and Pakistan) adhering to the same ecumenical philosophy as the EUB Board. They all remain affiliated with, but not connectionally organic members, of the UMC.

Thus united churches (independent and ecumenical) were the preferred option for EUB-related mission efforts. In only two countries, Japan and the Dominican Republic, did the former EUB and former ME churches join with other denominations in united churches. By contrast there were only two countries where EUB missionaries established EUB conferences: Germany (4) and Sierra Leone (1). The EUB Mission Board worked tirelessly to encourage Sierra Leone to form a united church with the Anglican and British Methodists in the country, but to no avail. Sierra Leone chose autonomy in 1968 but reversed that decision and became a member of the West Africa Central Conference of the UMC in 1981.

A review of the following mission efforts will complete the audit of EUB missions. In Brazil the EUB was briefly a part of a united church while the ME missions related to an autonomous ME church. In Ecuador where there was no ME work, the EUB related to a united church. In China the EUB folded its work into a united church (based in Hong Kong after the revolution), while the MEs worked in annual conferences. In Nigeria the EUB worked cooperatively with the Muri Christian Church of the Sudan—a work initiated by the independent Sudan United Mission. It remained independent until 1980 when the General Conference of the UMC approved a petition from church leaders in Nigeria to become United Methodists by joining the West Africa Central Conference. In Indonesia the mission efforts worked cooperatively with local ecumenical agencies and cooperating denominational mission boards.

The united churches in Puerto Rico, Philippines, Ecuador, Japan, China (Hong Kong), and Dominican Republic remain autonomous but affiliated with the

Telescope-Messenger

Is published twice yearly by the Center
For the Evangelical United Brethren Heritage
United Theological Seminary
4501 Denlinger Road
Trotwood, OH 45426

Editor: Robert L. Frey
Compositor: Patricia Frey
Printer: Mound Printing Co. Inc.

Correspondence should be sent to the editor at
1356 Hidden Creek Drive
Miamisburg, OH 45342

Rfrey004@woh.rr.com

UMC today. Sierra Leone and Nigeria are now conferences within the official membership connection of the UMC. Church relationships in the People's Republic of China are managed cooperatively through the emergent government approved China Christian Council.

The UMC Global Church Proposals

The Central Conference structure is a vestige of a missionary history that is tinged with the marks of dependence. Such a structure was once defined by an observer of the former EUB Church as “scaffolding” that remains in place while the church is being built, but is jettisoned when construction is completed. Left in place for a variety of reasons, the Central Conference option still offers a vital connective linkage that enables ministries where external resources and/or relationships are required in Africa, Europe, and Asia (Philippines).

Ironically, recent proposals to re-structure the UMC around its growing global membership have favored universalizing the Central Conference structure as a means of “equalizing” regional representation. Central Conferences would become the regional governance structure for all conferences in Asia, Europe, and Africa, where they now mostly function on a minimal basis, as well as those in the U.S. where the structure has no precedence. The occasional business sessions of the Central Conferences would handle only those administrative and policy matters assigned by the *Book of Discipline* as well as some contextual issues pertinent to the conferences in their regions. They would be amenable to a global General Conference with exclusive authority to address general church and constitutional matters.

That model was definitively developed for, but defeated by, the 2000 General Conference. The 2008 General Conference adopted changes in disciplinary and constitutional language to implement the structural components of the model, but failed ratification by the annual conferences. The 2012 General Conference took a more moderate approach approving a covenant for inclusion in the *Book of Discipline* that affirms the global nature of the denomination and becomes a place holder for future consideration of structural reform. Delegates from the conferences in the U.S. are wary of adding another layer to their existing connective structure. Delegates from existing Central Conferences struggle with a proposal that only promises organizational parity with other regions, but fails to empower them beyond their inherited patterns of missionary dependency. The path to unity and equality among a global membership requires a different vision, the

roots of which may well be found in re-casting the traditional mission emphases of the EUB upon indigenous leadership, independent governance, and ecumenical connections.

Mission Administration

Another contrast between EUB and ME mission programs is in the area of management—especially their respective reach and responsibility. The limited size of the membership and modest resources of the EUB placed constraints upon the scope of its mission outreach. Smaller budgets for missionary deployment meant fewer fields of operation. And, small numbers of missionaries (about 146 in 1968) argued for cooperation with other mission-sending organizations to realize a greater impact.

ME mission efforts in the 19th and 20th centuries thrived on expansion—first moving aggressively across North America and then following American business interests overseas to establish expatriate churches in Latin America and Asia, and then Africa. By the mid-20th century the ME had over 1,800 missionaries deployed globally and connective church relationships in over 50 countries.

Missionary Preparation and Support. In the years immediately prior to church union, ME and EUB missionary recruits participated in an inter-denominational missionary orientation and training program at Stony Point Conference Center in New York. Some common principles of leadership were emerging. The philosophy of partnership with national church leadership was generally embraced. Nomenclature such as “fraternal worker” replaced the paternalistic imagery of “missionary.” The theme emerging from the 1963 Assembly of the World Council of Churches “mission to and from six continents” was readily accepted with the arrival of missionaries from the young national churches abroad to serve in conferences and churches in the United States.

Finances. The financial support of all former EUB and ME missionaries was assumed by the mission boards. However, missionaries successfully raised support toward their salaries through solicitation of pledges from supporting churches. They also promoted special giving to projects they helped administer in places of assignment. Periodic home leaves were devoted to rigorous rounds of itineration in local churches that nurtured supportive relationships as well as cultivated financial support.

The mission outreach of both denominations was affected by the vagaries of the national economy. The conservative philosophy of the EUB tradition protected it from outright shutdowns of its missionary initiatives. But the more aggressive and further

reaching ME approach was vulnerable to several occasions of recalling missionaries because of downward economic cycles.

Both denominations promoted apportioned giving among their churches for budgetary support of their missionary programs. After World War II, major appeals for overseas relief and rebuilding efforts were launched by both churches. This special channel for fund raising was so successful that both denominations approved its continuation and expansion into second mile giving opportunities (beyond apportionments) for missionaries and for mission projects. There was one significant difference in the administration of these funds, however. When the EUB established its designated giving program (Advance for the Kingdom) the mission board held the money contributed one year for expenditure the next. Thus its missionaries could budget and spend responsibly. Gifts to the ME "Advance for Christ and His Kingdom" program were forwarded monthly to the field treasurers in unpredictable amounts making budgeting for ongoing needs impossible.

One difference to be reconciled at merger in 1968 was participation in a common missionary pension plan. The funding of EUB missionary pensions was mingled with those of the benefit plans provided for denominational staff persons. At first, ten years of missionary service was required for vesting in the plan. By the time of church union the required service was reduced to five years. Missionary pensions for former ME missionaries serving beyond the U.S. were fully funded by a generous endowment—a family owned (and sustainably managed) forestry business. There was no vesting requirement for participation. At union it was possible to bring all active overseas EUB missionaries into the former ME plan, primarily because of the small number of EUB missionaries. Later those inactive EUB missionaries who had not yet begun receiving their pensions were also transferred into the program.

Women Organized for Mission. The strongest constituency for direct support of missionary activity in each denomination was found among organized groups of women. Women's circles in local churches engaged in study and raised funds for missionary personnel.

Women's work in the ME was organized independent of the established mission board of the denomination when dominant male church leaders in the mid-19th century resisted overtures to introduce women to the missionary movement. Consequently, the women's missionary unit was organized and proceeded to recruit, support, and send women

personnel into mission placements that focused ministries on constituencies of women and children. The women were adept at raising funds and building significant educational, social service, and medical institutions at home and abroad. In 1964 the General Conference ruled that dual mission boards (one representing the whole denomination and another directed and financed by women) was duplicative and inefficient and combined both into the existing World and National Divisions of the Board of Missions.

The organization of women in mission at the national level of the EUB enjoyed a measure of autonomy but never engaged in direct administration of missionary personnel. They worked in close collaboration with the denominational Board of Missions in setting policy and in decisions for allocating its support for mission priorities. They also promoted programs of mission education for children where many of us in the EUB tradition first learned about missions through the organization of Mission Bands for children in our local churches. Women members of the churches were kept informed about mission outreach through subscriptions to *The World Evangel*. They sponsored the popular Summer Christmas Tree programs that not only raised funds for mission projects but also created a global awareness in the minds of young people and stimulated many to consider a missionary vocation. The EUB Women's Council funded the chairs of missions at the two theological seminaries.

Volunteer initiatives. In recent decades we have seen the energy for Christian mission move from denominational level initiatives to direct engagement in mission by conferences and local churches. This has been facilitated by the revolutions in travel and communications that allow churches to cultivate communications and meaningful partnerships across distances and cultures. The connectional structure of the UMC lends itself to the kind of networking that makes these relationships successful—but it is largely initiated and sustained at the local level. The vast UMC mission outreach to the former USSR and Eastern Europe at the end of the Cold War is fully indebted to this development.

Former EUBs recognize the antecedent for volunteering in mission in the youth and student work camps hosted by Red Bird Mission, or in the student exchange programs between Reutlingen Seminary in Germany and Evangelical Theological and United Theological seminaries in the U.S. Summer travel programs sponsored by EUB-related colleges took students abroad to experience different cultural and religious realities. Furthermore, the enrollment of students from mission areas in EUB colleges and seminaries opened up the horizons of a

world church connection for provincial North American students.

Looking Forward

The passion of the church founders for a faith based on personal salvation and the redemption of the world is still shaping United Methodism’s mission in today’s world. At the 2012 General Conference the General Board of Global Ministries offered an accounting for the extension of the church’s mission in more than 75 countries. It celebrated the growth and vitality of historic mission relationships on five continents and reported on the nurturing of more recent mission initiatives where the gospel and the UMC are being introduced for the first time.

Mission colleagues of other Protestant traditions frequently ask how United Methodists can be so fully engaged and respond to so many new challenges in mission. Clearly, it must be attributed to a missionary God at work among God’s people. And, it is a faithful response in building intentional relationships for nurture by the people called Methodists.

This paper has explored differences within our respective EUB and ME traditions. The blending of these traditions through church union has been remarkably smooth. But since the UMC is notably a “church quadrennial” not a “church eternal,” elements of each are likely to resurface with each round of decision-making about the global future of the church. It is well to reflect on this history from time to time to ensure a higher quality dialogue and a greater appreciation for strong faith foundations and vital structural signs that we are being led by one Spirit into future mission challenges.

1. Paul Eller, *The History of Evangelical Missions* (Harrisburg, PA, 1941), p. 6.

2. The text of Dr. Schaefer’s presentation at the 1966 Green Lake Consultation was included in an unpublished Study Guide distributed to participants under the title “the Perspective of the Evangelical United Brethren Church” pp. 64-70. The quote appears on page 68. The text also appears as a report to the ME Commission on the Structure of Methodism Overseas meeting in Seattle WA November 13-15, 1965. The full text appeared in the 1966 spring issue of the *Seminary Review* published by Evangelical Theological Seminary, pp 16-21.

3. Eller, p. 49.

4. Wade C. Barclay, *History of Methodist Missions*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1957), pp. 159- 160.

Robert Harman is an ordained clergy in the Northern Illinois Conference (UMC). He served rural, urban, and suburban pastorates and as a district superintendent. He became the planning officer of the General Board of Global Ministries and from 1989 – 2000 was the chief administrative officer for the world mission program. He is now retired and lives in Danbury, Wisconsin, and Chicago.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Return payment to: The Center for the EUB Heritage
United Theological Seminary
4501 Denlinger Road
Dayton, OH 45426

- I wish to establish my membership (\$20)
- Renew my membership in the Center (\$20)
- Life membership (\$500 or more)
- Supporting Member (\$50)
- Preservationist level membership (\$1,000 or more)

Membership includes a subscription to the *Telescope-Messenger*. Amounts in excess of \$10 are tax-deductible as charitable donations for IRS purposes.

Name _____ Address _____
City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

United Theological Seminary
Center for the Evangelical United Brethren Heritage
4501 Denlinger Road
Trotwood, OH 45426

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
DAYTON, OH
PERMIT NO. 579

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED